UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1993/NGO/18
4 February 1993

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Forty-ninth session
Agenda item 10 (a)

QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT, IN PARTICULAR: TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[3 February 1993]

TORTURE IN EGYPT

1. The International Federation of Leagues of Human Rights (IFHR) and its affiliate, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), are extremely concerned by the persistence of the constant use of torture by law enforcement officers in Egypt, and wish to draw to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights, EOHR's conclusions on this problem after several years of an important campaign against torture.

2. In spite of the fact that Egyptian law and the Constitution prohibit torture, police and security bodies in the country persist in resorting to it.

3. Also, in spite of the fact that Egypt was the first Arab country to ratify in 1986 the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, torture which had been reintroduced to the country five years before the ratification of the Convention by the Egyptian Government has continued unabated since then.

4. During the past three years, EOHR issued four reports on torture in Egypt. The first, issued in January 1990, dealt with torture in the central and local headquarters of the State Security Intelligence Police. A second report, in November 1990, dealt with torture in police stations. The third report, in August 1991, dealt with torture in a number of Egyptian prisons. The fourth report, in December 1992, dealt with torture in Central Security Forces Camps.

5. EOHR has addressed all the concerned authorities in Egypt, informing them of each torture case of which it had received information. Regretfully, it received not a single reply.

6. EOHR has, furthermore, submitted numerous formal complaints of torture cases to the Public Prosecutor and to local prosecution bodies. Again, we have to regretfully report that these complaints received scant attention and were without results. This occurred in cases in which immediate action was required so that forensic medical examiners could be assigned to examine the torture victims before the forensic evidence of the crime committed against them was given time to disappear. It may be said in effect, that torture has become an unpunishable offence in Egypt.

7. In this regard, the EOHR points out that while the way to investigate complaints of torture in police stations seems open, although slow, the way to investigate allegations of torture in places under the authority of State Security Police Intelligence (SSPI) seems completely closed. In this case indeed, a decision must be taken to suspend the immunity which those bodies enjoy against the Constitution, the law and the Prosecutor General.

8. EOHR also regrets to report that torture has become routine police procedure carried out by ordinary police officers in police stations as well as by officers of the State Security Intelligence Police at its diverse headquarters in Cairo and the provinces. Camps of the Anti-riot Central Security Forces have also been used as torture centres. Torture is administered with the aim of extracting confessions or as punishment of political opponents and suspects.

9. Torture was restored to Egypt in the wake of the assassination of former President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and in conjunction with the phenomenon of violence committed by some political Islamist groups. Persons suspected of belonging to Islamist groups have accounted for the bulk of torture victims during the past decade. While condemning the acts of violence committed by some political groups, EOHR totally rejects any use of this violence as justification for torture either of persons suspected of committing acts of violence or of any others.

10. Torture has not been limited however to suspected Islamist activists. It has come to include among its victims persons suspected of belonging to Nasserist and Communist organizations, Christians accused of enticing Muslims to convert and Muslims accused of converting to Christianity. Torture victims have also counted among their number three members of the EOHR Board of Trustees and other members of the organization. During the past decade, torture victims have included journalists, lawyers, workers, doctors, engineers and university and school students. Numbers of Palestinian residents and visitors have also been among the victims of torture in Egypt.

11. Alongside the above cases of torture involving political cases, scores of Egyptian citizens are exposed on a daily basis to torture and inhuman or degrading treatment in hundreds of police stations around the country, where torture and mistreatment have become routine police procedure in the investigation of ordinary crimes and the interrogation of suspects.

12. Methods of torture include the stubbing of burning cigarette ends into the bodies of the victims, beating with whips, leather straps as well as with solid objects, hanging in extremely awkward positions for long durations resulting occasionally in temporary of permanent paralysis, and the application of electric shocks to the genitals and to other sensitive parts of the body. Torture is normally accompanied by other forms of abuse and mental torture including severe verbal abuse and threats to kill the victim, rape him or his wife or women kinsfolk.

13. Recent information received by EOHR indicates that victims may have been sexually abused both through the use of solid objects and later through rape by one of their torturers.

14. EOHR is of the view that torture is an officially sanctioned policy in Egypt, particularly towards certain political opposition groups. In support of this conclusion is the fact that the restoration of torture took place in a political situation (the assassination of President Sadat). Certain torture implements such as those used for the administration of electric shock torture cannot be imported without Government knowledge. The central headquarters of the State Security Intelligence Police, one of the worst torture centres in the country, is in Lazoughly in Cairo directly adjacent to the Ministry of the Interior building.

15. To continue to deny the occurrence of torture convinces no one, serving only to reassure those responsible for the torture and hence to encourage its use without fear.

16. EOHR put forward the following demands to the authorities:

(a) To ban torture and instruments of torture at all places of detention (SSIP headquarters, police stations, prisons, police departments, CSF camps, etc.).

(b) To decide on all torture complaints submitted to the prosecution bodies in the past years.

(c) To initiate legal criminal proceedings against persons responsible for torture.

17. The International Federation of Leagues of Human Rights calls upon the Commission on Human Rights to consider carefully the conclusions of its affiliate, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, and to take all appropriate measures that could help eradicate torture in Egypt. Finally, IFHR respectfully requests the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to focus on the situation of torture in Egypt.